

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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y5* 1. A computer-implemented method for interactively and electronically distributing rewards, comprising the steps of:

displaying an image on a computer screen of a local computer, the image comprising a reward indicator, wherein the local computer is coupled to a computer network;

enabling a user to select the image;

at a central location coupled to the computer network, determining the identity of the user;

at the central location, allocating to the user a reward associated with the image; and

optionally redirecting the local computer to content associated with the image.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of determining the identity of the user further comprises the steps of:

determining if the local computer comprises a cookie storing an ID number indicating the identity of the user; and

providing the ID number to the central location.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of determining the identity of the user further comprises the steps of:

determining if the local computer comprises a cookie storing an ID number indicating the identity of the user;

if there is no cookie storing an ID number at the local computer, asking the user to input an ID number;

providing the ID number to the central location; and checking the validity of the ID number at the central location.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of determining the identity of the user further comprises the steps of:

determining if the local computer comprises a datafile storing an ID number indicating the identity of the user and providing the ID number to the central location;

if there is no datafile storing an ID number at the local computer, asking the user to provide a pre-assigned ID number;

if the user does not have a pre-assigned ID number, collecting information from the user and thereafter allocating an ID number to the user; and

if an ID number is provided to the central location, checking the validity of the ID number at the central location.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the computer network is the Internet and the central location is a webserver coupled to a database, the step of redirecting further comprising the steps:

providing the local computer with an address of a website comprising the content associated with the image;

causing a browser program at the local computer to navigate to the website.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein the step of allocating

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to the user a reward associated with the image further comprises the steps of:

storing a reward identifier in the database associated with the user; and

optionally causing a message to be displayed to the user at the local computer informing the user of the reward allocated to the user.

7. The method of claim 5 further comprising the steps of:

allowing the user to access the database via the Internet; and

providing to the user, via the Internet, a list of rewards that have been allocated to the user.

8. The method of claim 7 further comprising the steps of:

allowing the user to select a reward from the list of rewards;

providing the local computer with an address of a promoter website comprising the content associated with the reward;

causing a browser program at the local computer to navigate to the promoter website; and

enabling the user to redeem the reward at the promoter website.

9. The method of claim 8 further comprising the step of expiring the redeemed reward.

10. The method of claim 5 further comprising the steps of:

allowing the user to visit a promoter website and engage in a transaction;

allowing the user to indicate that the user desires to redeem a reward;

passing control to the webserver;

providing to the user, via the Internet, a list of applicable rewards that have been allocated to the user as stored in the database;

allowing the user to select a reward from the list of applicable rewards;

causing a browser program at the local computer to navigate to the promoter website; and

redeeming the reward at the promoter website.

11. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of expiring the redeemed reward.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein the imaged displayed on the computer screen comprises text.

13. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of displaying an image on a computer screen of a local computer comprises displaying an image on a computer screen of a local computer, the image not comprising a reward indicator.

14. The method of claim 3 wherein the step of asking the user to input an ID number comprises the step of

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obtaining a unique identifier from a physical memory device.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the physical memory device is one of a magnetic stripe card or smartcard.

16. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of

allowing the user to print the reward at the local computer;

enabling the user to redeem the reward at a physical location.

*and  
yb* 17. A computer-implemented method for interactively and electronically distributing and redeeming rewards via a computer network, the computer network coupled to a user computer and a central computer, the central computer coupled to a database, the computer network also coupled to a plurality of promoter computers, the method comprising the steps of:

at the user computer, displaying an image comprising a reward indicator;

enabling a user to select the image;

at a central computer, determining the identity of the user;

at the central computer, allocating to the user a reward associated with the reward indicator by storing a reward identifier in the database associated with the user; and

causing the user computer to connect with one of the

plurality of promoter computers associated with the selected image;

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when the user wishes to redeem a reward, the central computer providing the user computer with a list of rewards associated with the user as stored in the database;

allowing the user to select a reward;

redeeming the reward at one of the plurality of promoter computers associated with the selected reward.

18. The method of claim 17 further comprising the step of expiring the redeemed reward.

*put up*  
19. An interactive reward allocation and redemption method comprising:

providing a central computer coupled to a central database for storing rewards allocated to users, the central computer coupled to a computer network of user computers and promoter computers;

if a user at a user computer selects an advertisement with a reward indicator:

- (a) obtaining information to identify the user,
- (b) allocating a reward to the user in the central database, the reward associated with the selected advertisement and a promoter, and
- (c) transferring control to a promoter computer associated with the selected advertisement; and

if a user at a user computer indicates that the user desires to redeem a reward allocated to the user:

- (a) obtaining information to identify the user,

- (b) providing to the user a list of rewards allocated to the user;
- (c) allowing the user to select one of the rewards in the list of rewards, and
- (d) instructing the promoter honor the reward.

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20. An interactive computer-controlled reward system to allow a user to collect rewards, the system comprising:  
a computer network;  
a user computer coupled to the computer network, the user computer enabling the user to select images with associated reward indicators;  
a central computer coupled to the computer network, the central computer comprising a database, the database storing a list of available offers including rewards and conditions associated with the available offers and a promoter and a registered users and the rewards allocated to each user; and  
a promoter computer coupled to the computer network;  
wherein, when the user selects an image with an associated reward indicator, control is passed to the central computer which identifies the user and allocates a reward to the user associated with the selected image.

21. The system of claim 20 wherein the image is an advertisement.

22. The system of claim 20 wherein the computer network is the Internet, and the central computer is a webserver, and the promoter computer is a webserver.

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23. The system of claim 22 wherein the user computer includes a cookie that stores a user ID.
24. The system of claim 22 wherein control is passed to the promoter computer by the central computer after the central computer allocates a reward to the user.
25. The system of claim 20 wherein control is passed to the promoter computer by the central computer after the central computer allocates a reward to the user.
26. The system of claim 20 wherein the user computer is an automatic teller machine.
27. The system of claim 20 wherein the user computer is a personal data assistant.
28. The system of claim 20 wherein the user computer is a point of sale terminal.
29. The system of claim 20 wherein the user computer is an in-seat entertainment unit.
30. The system of claim 20 wherein the user computer is a self-service kiosk.
31. The system of claim 20 wherein the user computer is a telephone with a computer chip and display screen.

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32. An interactive computer controlled reward system to allow a user to rewards previously collected by the user, each reward associated with a promoter, the system comprising:

a computer network;

a central computer coupled to the computer network, the central computer comprising a database, the database storing a list of registered users and a list of rewards that have been previously collected by each user and that are available for redemption;

a user computer coupled to the computer network, the user computer enabling the user to select a reward for redemption from the list of rewards; and

a promoter computer coupled to the computer network, the promoter computer operated by a promoter;

wherein, when the user wishes to redeem a reward, control is passed to the central computer which identifies the user and allows the user to select a reward from the list of rewards, and thereafter control is passed to the promoter computer for the user to redeem the selected reward.

33. The system of claim 32 wherein the user computer comprises a printing device to allow the user to print a reward for physical redemption.

34. The system of claim 32 wherein the image is an advertisement.

35. The system of claim 32 wherein the computer network

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is the Internet, and the central computer is a webserver, and the promoter computer is a webserver.

36. The system of claim 32 wherein the user computer includes a cookie that stores a user ID.

37. The system of claim 32 wherein the user can access the central computer to transfer a reward on the list of rewards to another registered user.

38. An interactive reward allocation and redemption system comprising:

a central database for storing rewards allocated to users;

a central computer coupled to the central database and to a computer network of user computers and promoter computers;

means, located at the central computer, for obtaining information to identify a user;

means, located at the central computer, for allocating a reward to the user in the central database if the user at a user computer selects an advertisement with an optional reward indicator, the reward associated with the selected advertisement and a promoter;

means, located at the central computer, for transferring control to a promoter computer associated with the selected advertisement; and

means, located at the central computer, for providing to the user a list of rewards allocated to the user;

means, located at the central computer, for enabling the user to select one of the rewards in the list of rewards; and

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means to instruct the promoter computer of the promoter associated with the selected reward that a valid reward has been selected for redemption by the user.

39. The system of claim 38 further comprising means to allow a user to transfer a reward in the list of rewards to another registered user.